

End User Training in an Electronic World

by

Harriet Oxley

**Ruth H. Hooker Research Library and Technical Information
Center**

Naval Research Laboratory

The Naval Research Laboratory, NRL, is the Department of the Navy's corporate research laboratory, and is the principle in-house component of its parent organization, the Office of Naval Research in Arlington, VA. The main NRL site is located in Washington, DC. The other principal facilities are located in Monterey, California, and Stennis Space Center in Mississippi. All together, there are about 3,244 federal employees, of which 1,600 are scientist and engineers, and approximately 1,000 on-site contractors.

Some of the broad fields of research performed at NRL includes: computer science and information technology; electronic, directed energy and survivability technology; electronic warfare and imaging systems; geosciences, meteorology and oceanography; materials and ocean acoustics; and space systems and undersea technology.

The library facilitates end user access to a wide range of scientific and technical information resources. Some representative library resources are: OCLC FirstSearch; Community of Science; Meteorological & Geophysical Abstracts; Science Citation Index Expanded; NTIS; and Materials Safety Data Sheets. The library also provides network access to over 400 full-text journals in electronic format with licensing agreements with, among others the American Physical Society, Elsevier Publishing, and the Institute of Physics.

End users have been able to search the library's online catalog since 1983. However, all other online searching was performed in the library by reference staff. In 1988, the library introduced CD-ROM databases for end user searching in its reference area. Users reacted very favorably to the CD-ROM products, indicating their preference to explore and perform their own searches.

To extend such search capabilities to users in their offices, the Library implemented a NRL-wide information system called the InfoNet in 1992. InfoNet users

were offered a single menu to select from a wide variety of information resources including: library-mounted CD-ROM databases; the Library's on-line catalog; and remote services resident on the Internet. In 1995, the Library introduced a complementary Web-based system called InfoWeb. By the beginning of 1998, InfoNet was replaced entirely by its Web counterpart.

Recognizing that the InfoNet and later the InfoWeb enabled users to query information systems without leaving their offices, a decision was made to provide end user training. Key questions asked when initiating end user training were: who will provide training; how will training be presented; and how will support and troubleshooting be handled?

Primarily, training is performed by a staff reference personnel and vendors. Sometimes, depending on the nature of the presentation, the Chief Librarian and the Associate Librarian for Information Technology participate in the briefing.

The decision to use library staff in the training program was based on staff knowledge of users and their needs, familiarity with the organization's mission and research areas, and availability for follow-up.

The rationale for including Vendors as co-presenters allows the Library to capitalize on their expert knowledge of their particular resource, experienced in training with their product, and capability for providing manuals and brochures. Even though the vendor provides the training, the reference person coordinates all other aspects associated with the vendor training.

Training is mainly accomplished through seminars, tutorials, and demonstrations and classes. The Library's first training effort consisted of an ongoing seminar program, with sessions being held on the first Tuesday and third Thursday of each month. Each session emphasizes a particular InfoNet capability and is presented as a stand-alone session, enabling participants to attend only those sessions that interest them.

New federal employees are sent welcoming letters from the Library and invited to schedule a tutorial session. Other employees are referred for tutorials when they are identified as new library users or express interest in one of the InfoWeb services. Tutorials are tailored to cover the interest of participants and some classes are aimed at target audiences. Unscheduled tutorials are provided on a time available basis and refresher sessions are given tailored to needs of individual.

Library reference staff arrange for demonstrations and classes by vendors to accomplish specified objectives. A driving force might be the introduction of a new database or information product. At other times classes are scheduled to highlight a

product's specific features.

Support and troubleshooting is handled in the following manner: every end user is provided a point-of contact; questions are answered in person, by phone or through e-mail; and handouts designed in-house act as user aids.

Several benefits of end user training for the Ruth H. Hooker Research Library and Technical Information center are: empowerment of the user community; better utilization of both staff and user time; and increased expertise of reference staff.